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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Tuesday, November 3, 2009

Secretary Clinton Reaffirms US Policy on Western Sahara in Support of Moroccan Autonomy Solution

Washington, DC (Nov. 3) – Speaking in Marrakech Monday at a press conference with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri, following a meeting with King Mohammed VI, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reaffirmed the current US policy on resolving the Western Sahara conflict—that autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the only realistic solution for ending the more than 30-year dispute. "It is important for me to reaffirm, here in Morocco, that there has been no change in our policy," said Clinton responding to a question as to whether the Obama Administration stands by the US position supporting Morocco's autonomy plan in the Sahara.

"It is a plan, as you know, that was started under the Clinton Administration. It was reaffirmed under the Bush Administration and remains the policy of the United States under the Obama Administration," Secretary Clinton said in an interview with the Maghreb Arab Press on Tuesday. "In view of our long-standing relationship, we are very aware that the circumstances are difficult. I do not want there to be any doubt, in the region or elsewhere, regarding our policy, which remains unchanged."

Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri thanked Clinton and noted that "our [Morocco-US] relations have continued to grow... today we stand ready to give it further impetus so as to deepen and strengthen our partnership and to give a new dimension to our strategic political dialogue between Rabat and Washington."

"We are very pleased to see Secretary Clinton's remarks reaffirming for the first time in public on behalf of the Obama Administration what has been a consistent and constructive US policy to resolve the Western Sahara dispute," said Robert Holley, Executive Director, Moroccan American Center for Policy. "That policy also enjoys continued bi-partisan majority support in the US Congress." Holley continued, "A broad internationally acceptable autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the only realistic solution for ending the Western Sahara conflict."

Clinton was in Marrakesh for the sixth ministerial meeting of the *Forum for the Future*, a developing/industrialized nations' initiative to advance regional security, economic development, religious tolerance, and social reforms.

The UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara, US Ambassador Christopher Ross is currently working on a possible fifth round of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front, with the participation of neighboring countries Algeria and Mauritania in an ongoing effort to end the conflict.

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The Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP) is a non-profit organization whose principal mission is to inform opinion makers, government officials and interested publics in the United States about political and social developments in Morocco and the role being played by the Kingdom of Morocco in broader strategic developments in North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. For more, please visit www.moroccanamericanpolicy.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday, October 29, 2009

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Jeff Fahey and USCRI Ask Congress to End Refugee Warehousing

New USCRI report, "Stonewalling on Refugee Rights," documents Sahrawi refugee rights abuse in Algeria

Washington, DC, Oct. 29 – "Being a refugee shouldn't be a life sentence—but that's exactly what it's become for millions of refugees who have been confined to camps and denied their freedom, some for 30 years," said *LOST* cast member & international advocate **Jeff Fahey**. On Tuesday he went to Capitol Hill with the **US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)** and former US Ambassador **Michael Ussery** to meet Members of Congress and the press to urge an end to the inhumane practice of warehousing refugees. Of nearly 14 million refugees worldwide, 8.5 million have been warehoused and denied their basic rights for a decade or more despite guarantees in the 1951 Refugee Convention—which include the right to move about freely, work, receive documentation, and choose a place of residence.

"Unfortunately," said Fahey, "these refugees have been forgotten and ignored by the very international organizations established to look out for their most basic rights and ensure their welfare."

Fahey and Ussery were joined by USCRI's **Lavinia Limón**, president & CEO, at a briefing hosted by the co-chairs of the Bipartisan Congressional Refugee Caucus. **Rep. Mike Rogers** (R-MI) joined a press briefing to voice his support for the campaign to end refugee warehousing. USCRI released a letter to donor countries from Thai civil society asking for rights-based alternatives, and a new report: "Stonewalling on Refugee Rights, Algeria and The Sahrawi," interviewing refugees who recently escaped the abuse that tens of thousands of Sahrawi refugees endure in the Tindouf camps in Algeria.

On September 10, the **UN's High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres**, made the first visit by a UNHCR head to the Tindouf camps in Algeria since 1976 and noted, "I recognize that not enough has been done and that the international community should wake up... we have to work more and better." Jeff Fahey said he was pleased the UN High Commissioner visited the camps and was recommending steps to help the refugees. "But he needs to do more. A 2nd and 3rd generation of children are being born into the hopelessness of these camps."

"From Thailand to Kenya to Algeria, these refugees have been confined to camps and forced to subsist on meager rations for 5, 15, 30 years or more," said Lavinia Limón. It's an appalling way to treat human beings. It's a terrible way to spend US tax dollars and aid from other donor nations. Resources would be much better spent helping refugees rebuild their lives, not ensuring they remain refugees the rest of their lives."

"The real enemy of Sahrawi refugees is not the desert, however hot the sun and sand are," said Ussery. "They are victims of a perfect storm: a blind eye and neglect by UNHCR; restrictive policies by Algeria which denies the consequences of its actions while enabling the Polisario; and a non-transparent Polisario Front ruling entity that abuses the rights and controls their day-to-day lives of refugees, who are confined to the camps, forced to take handouts, and unable to make a better life for themselves."

Among the group's recommendations to end the abuses of warehousing & improve refugees' lives:

- 1.** Establish a program in the camps allowing refugees who want to return to their homes or go elsewhere to do so without intimidation, without being arrested, and without being abused by the security forces.
- 2.** Conduct a census to ensure an accurate count and provide documentation for free movement and travel.
- 3.** Establish in-camp UNHCR presence to monitor aid distribution & prevent widespread hijacking & misuse.

4. Implement durable, rights- and community-based solutions to help refugees resettle, rebuild their lives.

***For the new Report and other information from USCRI on warehousing Sahrawi refugees in Algeria, go to: <http://www.refugees.org/article.aspx?id=2398&subm=33&area=About%20Refugees&>**

***For more on refugee rights, also see: www.moroccanamericanpolicy.org/refugee/report.pdf**

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